A new location for HOEOCA in 2015 – Flat. Flat, Flat – we were off to Holland.

Most took lunchtime flights with KLM from Birmingham to Schiphol whence, having waited for the Bristol contingent, our mini bus whisked us off to Lemmer via a few bulb fields for good measure.

Lemmer is situated about half way up the Ijsselmeer on the Eastern side and provided a good base to decide whether to go North, South or West depending on the weather. Our 3 Bavaria yachts from Lemmer Yacht Charters: Slock, Classica and Enrico C awaited us and handovers took place whilst the crew were sent to the on-site hotel for a first Dutch beer. Delighted to find that Lemmer contained Aldi, Lidl and Jumbo for victualing – although we worked out the next day that we could have berthed our yachts conveniently to do this.

Overnight rain and a gloomy morning saw skippers convening to decide the best destination and, after the usual messing, we set off towards Makkum, a distance of 28M. What we hadn’t calculated for was the hour it took to motor through the town, waiting for the bridges and lock. Classica left first and made it to Makkum but Slock and Enrico, being about an hour behind, amended their plans and made for Stavoren given the wet and rather unpleasant conditions.

On Sunday morning the wind had gone to the North with a consequent drop in temperature and Enkhuizen, on the west side of the Ijsselmeer, was agreed as the destination. After a good, albeit chilly, sail it was necessary for a bridge to be raised to allow us into the old harbour where we berthed in the middle of this lovely town. Everyone had time to explore before attending drinks & nibbles on-board Slock. Later in the evening the Irish pub found most of us dancing to the 50s band.

Monday 25th April was Kings Day, a national holiday, and the sun was shining at last. We had been advised that Hoorn was the best place to enjoy this so headed south through the huge lock which divides the Ijsselmeer from the Markermeer (it goes over a road!). All 3 HOEOCA boats moored in the same place in town where we were able to observe the festivities and admire the orange outfits of the Dutch.

A south westerly wind suited our plan to head back north to Medenblik a distance of 28 M, and we initially enjoyed a lovely broad reach. The later stages beating toward the town were a tad more challenging but we all tied up safely in the Mittelhaven and enjoyed lovely hot showers and the usual drinks and chat. Throughout the trip the facilities were very good & clean. There was always electricity even when we appeared to be moored in a street!

Workum, back on the eastern side, was our last destination as we had planned to avoid the bad weather forecast for Thursday and return to Lemmer through the canals. The transition from the inland sea to the canals was quite striking as conditions became more sheltered. We enjoyed the day motoring (you’d get bored if you did it every day), strange when the canal becomes a lake and you have to follow a very tight line of buoys. Lunch was taken at a fish and chip shop right by the canal.

Sadly, all too soon, we found ourselves back at base where we enjoyed drinks courtesy of Enrico and a group dinner together in town. Transport back handily came in the form of a brace of mini buses so, those staying over for a night or two in Amsterdam, were able to go straight to their destination whilst those flying home were dropped off at Schiphol in time for their late afternoon flight.

A very successful trip –we sailed about 120 miles on average. The nice thing was that it was different – the bridges, locks and being able to moor up in the middle of the towns were great. The food was mostly very good, high protein (lots of smoked salmon) and fruit and vegetables of a high standard. The exchange rate in Europe is currently very advantageous too. We were also taken by the helpfulness of the Dutch people. Only thing we’d change was the weather which could have been kinder. We’ll be back!